

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 18130 01 OF 03 040352Z  
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08  
FRB-03 INR-07 NSAE-00 SP-02 STR-05 TRSE-00 LAB-04  
SIL-01 OMB-01 USIA-06 NSC-05 SS-15 /076 W  
-----028750 040457Z /12

R 031723Z NOV 77  
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9970  
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN  
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS  
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN  
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN  
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E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, EC, UK  
SUBJECT: BRITISH ATTITUDES TOWARD THE EC

REF: A) LONDON 18000 B) LONDON 17538

SUMMARY: THIS IS THE SECOND OF A SERIES OF CABLES ON  
BRITAIN AND THE EC. IN JULY 1975, THE BRITISH PEOPLE  
VOTED OVERWHELMINGLY TO KEEP BRITAIN IN THE EC. SINCE  
THAT TIME POPULAR OPINION HAS SHIFTED, WITH A  
MAJORITY NOW BELIEVING BRITISH MEMBERSHIP WAS A MISTAKE,  
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PAGE 02 LONDON 18130 01 OF 03 040352Z

THOUGH THERE ARE SIGNS THIS VIEW IS MODERATING. BUT  
THIS SHIFT IN POPULAR ATTITUDE HAS NOT BEEN MIRRORED  
IN THE POSITIONS OF BRITAIN'S POLITICAL PARTIES AND IN  
LARGE PART REFLECTS THE ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THE PAST  
TWO YEARS. LABOR, UNDER PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN,  
HAS MOVED DIRECTLY COUNTER TO THE POPULAR TREND,  
ABANDONING ITS EARLIER OPPOSITION TO DIRECT ELECTIONS

TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. THE LABOR GOVERNMENT REMAINS COMMITTED TO CONTINUED BRITISH MEMBERSHIP, BUT IT IS OPENLY CRITICAL OF MANY EC INSTITUTIONS, WILL SEEK THEIR REFORM AND IS STILL HOSTILE TO THE FEDERAL CONCEPT. IT ALSO ATTACHES MORE IMPORTANCE TO BRITAIN'S TRADITIONAL LINK WITH THE U.S. THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY PLACES A GREATER EMPHASIS ON BRITAIN'S ROLE AS A EUROPEAN NATION AND ON COOPERATION WITHIN THE EC FRAMEWORK. THE TORIES BELIEVE THE EC SERVES BRITAIN'S ESSENTIAL ECONOMIC AND SECURITY INTERESTS, BUT ARE IMPRECISE IN DEFINING THEIR POLITICAL GOALS. DESPITE SOME SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES ON THE EC, THERE IS BROAD, PRAGMATIC SUPPORT FOR THE COMMUNITY IN BOTH MAJOR PARTIES. OF THE SMALLER PARTIES, ONLY THE SCOTTISH NATIONALISTS HAVE ALTERED THEIR POSITION SINCE THE 1975 REFERENDUM: ORIGINALLY OPPOSED TO THE COMMON MARKET, THEY NOW FAVOR AN INDEPENDENT SCOTLAND WITHIN THE EC. DESPITE LIMITED POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THE EC, WE DO NOT EXPECT A SERIOUS REVIVAL OF THE "GET BRITAIN OUT" CAMPAIGN. END SUMMARY.

1. POPULAR OPINION -- PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD UK MEMBERSHIP IN THE EC HAVE TURNED AROUND SINCE THE JULY 1975 REFERENDUM IN WHICH NEARLY TWO-THIRDS OF THE ELECTORATE VOTED TO KEEP BRITAIN IN THE COMMUNITY. ACCORDING TO RECENT OPINION POLL DATA, A MAJORITY BELIEVES LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 LONDON 18130 01 OF 03 040352Z

BRITISH MEMBERSHIP WAS DAMAGING' BUT A PLURALITY OPPOSES WITHDRAWAL. A POLL CONDUCTED IN LATE AUGUST SHOWED THAT 50 PERCENT OPPOSED MEMBERSHIP, AND ONLY 39 PERCENT FAVORED CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP (11 PERCENT UNDECIDED). ANOTHER POLL IN THE SAME TIMEFRAME ASKED RESPONDENTS HOW THEY WOULD VOTE ON A NEW REFERENDUM: 35 PERCENT FAVORED MEMBERSHIP AND 53 PERCENT OPPOSED (12 PERCENT UNDECIDED). BUT AN OCTOBER POLL SHOWED THAT A PLURALITY, 47 PERCENT, OPPOSED BRITISH WITHDRAWAL, SUGGESTING THAT THE PENDULUM MAY BE SWINGING BACK. CONVENTIONAL WISDOM ATTRIBUTES MUCH OF THE DECLINE IN SUPPORT FOR THE EC SINCE JULY 1975 TO INFLATION, PARTICULARLY IN FOOD PRICES. BRITISH MEMBERSHIP AND THE SOARING COST OF FOODSTUFFS SEEM IRREVOCABLY LINKED IN THE MINDS OF MOST BRITONS, DESPITE LITTLE EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THIS CONCLUSION. OTHER FACTORS SUCH AS STEADILY INCREASING UNEMPLOYMENT, EC FISHERIES POLICIES AND BRITAIN'S ADVERSE BALANCE OF TRADE WITHIN THE COMMUNITY ARE ALSO BELIEVED TO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE PUBLIC'S NEGATIVE PERCEPTION OF THE EC. BUT THE MOST REMARKABLE ASPECT OF THE SHIFT IN PUBLIC OPINION IS HOW LITTLE IT HAS AFFECTED THE POLITICAL PARTIES.

2. THE BRITISH ESTABLISHMENT HAS REMAINED STEAD-  
FASTLY PRO-EC. MOST FCO OFFICIALS ARE VIGOROUS SUP-  
PORTERS OF THE COMMUNITY AND ACTIVELY PUSH THE EUROPEAN

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PAGE 01 LONDON 18130 02 OF 03 040354Z  
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R 031723Z NOV 77  
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9971  
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AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS  
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 02 OF 03 LONDON 18130

INTEGRATIONIST CAUSE WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT. WHILE HOME  
CIVIL SERVANTS ARE LESS MONOCHROMATIC IN THEIR ATTITUDES  
TOWARD THE EC, A SUBSTANTIAL MAJORITY SEEMS TO FAVOR  
CONTINUED BRITISH PARTICIPATION. THE MEDIA TOO ARE  
ALMOST UNIFORMLY PRO-EC, REGARDLESS OF THEIR MANY  
DIFFERENCES ON DOMESTIC ISSUES. BUSINESS, AND PARTICULARLY  
BIG BUSINESS, IS NEARLY UNANIMOUSLY FAVORABLE TO THE  
COMMUNITY. SIMILARLY, MOST ACADEMICS WHO ARTICULATE  
VIEWS ARE PRO-EC.

3. LABOR PARTY ATTITUDES -- THE LABOR PARTY OPPOSED  
BRITISH MEMBERSHIP IN THE EC UNTIL RECENTLY, AND THIS

FACT SHAPED THE ACTIONS OF THE WILSON AND CALLAGHAN  
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PAGE 02 LONDON 18130 02 OF 03 040354Z

GOVERNMENTS. THE PARTY'S OFFICIAL POSITION ON THE EC, HOWEVER, HAS SHIFTED SIGNIFICANTLY IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS. PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN DEVISED A STRATEGY TO GET THE PARTY TO REVERSE ITS 1976 CONFERENCE DECISION TO OPPOSE DIRECT ELECTIONS, AND CARRIED IT OUT SUCCESSFULLY. HIS CONTROVERSIAL LETTER TO PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY RON HAYWARD WAS A KEY ELEMENT OF THIS STRATEGY. CALLAGHAN'S PLAN, MOREOVER, PREVENTED THE REVIVAL OF THE "GET BRITAIN OUT" CAMPAIGN BY DIE-HARD LABOR ANTI-MARKETEERS.

4. CLEARLY CALLAGHAN'S APPROACH TO THE EC, PARTICULARLY HIS COMMITMENT TO FIGHT FROM WITHIN FOR ITS REFORM, WAS DESIGNED WITH LABOR SUPPORTERS IN MIND -- POLL DATA SHOW THAT ANTI-MARKET ATTITUDES ARE MOST STRONGLY HELD AMONG LABOR VOTERS. HIS STRESS ON UK INTERESTS WAS IN TUNE WITH THE ATTITUDES OF ALL OF THE PARTY'S MAJOR SUB-GROUPINGS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE HARD CORE THAT WANTS BRITAIN OUT. BUT THERE IS MORE TO IT THAN THAT. CALLAGHAN'S LETTER TO HAYWARD ALSO REFLECTS HIS OWN VALUES, HIS PREFERENCE FOR THE LINK WITH THE U.S. AND HIS PRAGMATIC MIND SET. THE ANTI-EC GROUP IS DIMINISHING IN SIZE AND STRENGTH, HAVING LOST MANY OF ITS MORE ABLE LEADERS TO THE PRAGMATISTS. ALTHOUGH SOME LABOR PRO-MARKETEERS REMAIN COMMITTED TO THE CONCEPT OF A FEDERAL EUROPE, FEW BELIEVE IT IS A REALISTIC GOAL. THE LARGEST GROUP, THE PRAGMATISTS, INCLUDES MOST TRADE UNION LEADERS AND LABOR MPS AND ACCEPTS UK MEMBERSHIP WHILE REGARDING FEDERALISM AS A ROMANTIC NOTION. THIS GROUP STRESSES BRITISH INTERESTS AND BELIEVES THEY CAN BEST BE SERVED BY ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL COOPERATION WITHIN AN EXPANDED COMMUNITY HAVING A REVISED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK.

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PAGE 03 LONDON 18130 02 OF 03 040354Z

ITS MEMBERS REALIZE THAT BRITAIN CANNOT CALL THE SHOTS, BUT INTEND TO MAXIMIZE BRITAIN'S INFLUENCE TO SHAPE THE EC, ITS INSTITUTIONS AND ITS POLICIES.

5. CONSERVATIVE PARTY ATTITUDES -- THERE IS AN IRONY THAT A TRADITIONALLY NATIONALIST PARTY LIKE THE CONSERVATIVES, WHICH FOR SO LONG VIEWED EUROPE AS A COLLECTION OF NATIONS TO BE PLAYED OFF AGAINST EACH

OTHER, SHOULD NOW BE THE MAJOR BRITISH PARTY MOST DEVOTED TO EUROPEAN INTEGRATION. ALTHOUGH A VOCAL RUMP RIGHT-WING STILL REPRESENTS ANTI-EC SENTIMENT AND IS DISTURBED BY ANY COMPROMISE OF BRITISH SOVEREIGNTY, THE BULK OF THE PARTY AND ALMOST ALL ITS LEADERSHIP STRONGLY SUPPORT AN ACTIVE BRITISH ROLE IN EUROPE. IT WAS THE CONSERVATIVES WHO BROUGHT A HESITANT NATION INTO THE COMMUNITY, AND MANY TORIES BELIEVE THIS BRIDGING OF THE CHANNEL TO BE THE PARTY'S SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT POST-WAR ACHIEVEMENT.

6. THIS NEAR-CONSENSUS WITHIN THE PARTY STANDS ON BASIC ECONOMIC AND SECURITY CONCERNS. AS A TRADING NATION, BRITAIN NEEDS CONTINENTAL MARKETS; AS A COUNTRY OF STAGNATING PRODUCTIVITY, BRITAIN NEEDS THE STIMULUS OF CONTINENTAL COMPETITION. WHILE SOME OF THEIR ECONOMIC EXPECTATIONS HAVE BEEN DISAPPOINTED, THE TORIES ATTRIBUTE THE FAILURES MUCH MORE TO WORLD ECONOMIC DISLOCATIONS AND TO LABOR POLICIES AT HOME THAN TO THE EC. MOREOVER, THE ALTERNATIVE TO THE EC, TORIES SAY, IS AN ISOLATED ISLAND ECONOMY COMPETING AGAINST THE MASSIVE ECONOMIC WEIGHTS OF EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA, AND THAT WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE. THE COMMUNITY ALSO SERVES TORY PREOCCUPATIONS WITH SECURITY ISSUES. AN ECONOMICALLY STRONG EUROPE, INCLUDING BRITAIN, PRESENTS A LESS VULNERABLE TARGET FOR SOVIET AGGRESSION AND NURTURES THE KIND OF DOMESTIC STABILITY THAT RESISTS EXTREMISM. USUALLY UNSTATED, BUT MORE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 LONDON 18130 02 OF 03 040354Z

POINTED, THE TORIES BELIEVE BRITAIN IN THE EC CAN HELP BALANCE, CONTAIN AND ABSORB THE BURGEONING POWER OF

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PAGE 01 LONDON 18130 03 OF 03 040358Z  
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R 031723Z NOV 77

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 03 OF 03 LONDON 18130

MODERN GERMANY.

7. SO THE CONSERVATIVES ARE FIRMLY COMMITTED TO THE COMMUNITY. BUT AT THE POLITICAL LEVEL, TORY THINKING IS MORE AMBIGUOUS. ON THE ONE HAND, THERE ARE THE EUROPEANISTS, SUCH AS TED HEATH, WHO WOULD DE-EMPHASIZE THE US/UK RELATIONSHIP TO PROVE THEIR EUROPEAN CREDENTIALS, AND ON THE OTHER, THOSE WHO WOULD LIKEN BRITAIN'S EUROPE/US BALANCE TO A MAN STANDING ON BOTH FEET, BUT PLACING SLIGHTLY MORE WEIGHT ON THE EUROPEAN FOOT. BUT EVEN THE LATTER GROUP, WHICH CURRENTLY PREDOMINATES, IS UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO DEFINE ITS EUROPEAN POLITICAL GOALS PRECISELY. CONSERVATIVES SUPPORT DIRECT ELECTIONS

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PAGE 02 LONDON 18130 03 OF 03 040358Z

AND ASSUME THAT A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT WILL EVENTUALLY ESTABLISH A SYSTEM OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION. MOREOVER, THE PARTY IS MAKING EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY ITSELF WITH LIKE-MINDED ORGANIZATIONS ON THE CONTINENT. BUT MOST TORIES ARE NOT STARRY-EYED ABOUT A FEDERATED EUROPE, BELIEVING INSTEAD THAT UNITY MIGHT COME IN ITS OWN GOOD TIME, THAT THERE IS NO NEED TO RUSH THINGS AND CERTAINLY NO NEED TO SACRIFICE DOMESTIC POLITICAL INTERESTS FOR A VAGUE GOAL. IN OPPOSITION, THE TORIES HAVE NOT HAD TO DEFINE THEIR STAND ON POLITICAL COOPERATION OR POLITICAL INTEGRATION. BUT ONCE IN POWER, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY THAN LABOR, IN THE NAME OF EUROPEAN UNITY, TO RUN COUNTER TO AMERICAN INTERESTS ON SOME QUESTIONS.

8. ATTITUDES OF OTHER PARTIES -- THE LIBERALS PROBABLY HAVE THE STRONGEST COMMITMENT TO EUROPE OF ANY OF THE PARTIES, AND ARE CLEARLY THE MOST "FEDERALIST". THERE HAS BEEN NO CHANGE IN THE LIBERAL POSITION OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS. YET THE PARTY'S INFLUENCE IS MARGINAL, IN SPITE OF ITS PACT WITH THE GOVERNMENT. GIVEN ITS LIMITED POLITICAL POWER, IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT LIBERAL LEADERS PLACE THE HIGHEST PRIORITY ON PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION FOR THE EUROPEAN ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS. PR, AS THE LIBERALS SEE IT, IS ESSENTIAL TO ENSURE THAT BRITAIN'S DELEGATION TO THE ASSEMBLY IS REPRESENTATIVE. AND IT IS THE ONLY WAY THE LIBERALS ARE LIKELY TO GET A SEAT. THEY ALSO HOPE PR WILL ULTIMATELY BE ADOPTED FOR UK PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, GIVING THEM A GREATER SHARE OF THE DOMESTIC ACTION.

9. THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY'S (SNP) SHIFT ON THE EC ISSUE HAS BEEN THE MOST PRONOUNCED. BEFORE THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 LONDON 18130 03 OF 03 040358Z

REFERENDUM, THE SNP BELIEVED THE SCOTS WOULD OPPOSE CONTINUED UK MEMBERSHIP. WHEN THEY VOTED FOR THE EC -- ALBEIT BY A NARROWER MARGIN THAN THE ENGLISH -- THE SNP CHANGED DIRECTIONS. THE PARTY NOW ADVOCATES AN INDEPENDENT SCOTLAND WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.

10. CONCLUSION -- ALTHOUGH BRITISH OPINION HAS SHIFTED AGAINST THE EC OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS, AND THIS CHANGE WAS IN LARGE PART DUE TO POPULAR PERCEPTIONS OF THE SOURCE OF MANY OF BRITAIN'S ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THE EBB AND FLOW OF PUBLIC OPINION IS LIKELY TO AFFECT THE POLICIES OF THE MAJOR PARTIES OR THE GOVERNMENT. THE LABOR PARTY UNDER CALLAGHAN HAS ABANDONED ITS OPPOSITION TO THE EC, TAKING A MORE PRAGMATIC POSITION. WE DO NOT ANTICIPATE ANY CHANGE AS LONG AS LABOR REMAINS IN GOVERNMENT. THE CONSERVATIVES SHOW NO SIGN OF CHANGING THEIR TRADITIONAL PRO-EC POSTURE. ACCORDINGLY, WE SEE LITTLE CHANCE THAT UK MEMBERSHIP WILL AGAIN BECOME A CENTRAL POLITICAL ISSUE. BUT THERE IS EVEN LESS LIKELIHOOD THAT A BRITISH GOVERNMENT WILL SUPPORT POLITICAL, OR EVEN DEEPER ECONOMIC, INTEGRATION IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.

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## Message Attributes

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**Executive Order:** N/A  
**Errors:** N/A  
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**Review Markings:**  
Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
22 May 2009  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009